



Wildland Fire Investigation on Tribal Lands: BIA's Role In New Fire Investigation Course Development

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has in recent years actively pursued development of a wildland fire investigation program. Accurately identifying fire cause trends is critical to the success of a fire prevention program, and it is equally important in determining those responsible for unwanted fire. In cases that involve negligent acts, the responsible party may be pursued for recovery of suppression costs and trust property damages including rehabilitation, as well as other expenses. In those cases involving arson or other criminal acts, identifying and apprehending the perpetrator is of vital public interest as is the collection of damages.

The National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) Wildland Fire Investigation Working Team has recently completed design and development of the newest fire investigation curricula, FI-310: Wildland Fire Investigation-Complex Case Development. Successful completion of FI-310 and its taskbook leads to certification as a case manager wildland fire investigator.



Gary Hilton and Jim Nanamkin (attorney role players) review merits of Criminal cases prepared by students enrolled in FI-310.

The first conducted session of the FI-310 (alpha version) class was held in March of 2006 in Eagle, ID. Members of the national fire investigation working team served as the instructor cadre for this class. Bureau of Indian Affairs representatives to the working team, Jim Nanamkin of the Pacific Regional Office and Gary Hilton of Midwest and Eastern Regional Offices served as instructors and district attorney role players for the week long session.

Del Ostenberg, Colville Agency; and William Fisher, BIA cooperator from Washington State represented Indian Country among those in attendance as students. Paul Steensland, working team chair remarked, "By picking the best and the brightest to critique and peer review this course, we would come out at the end of the week with a much stronger product".

The BIA is working hard to get more qualified investigators into the field. Human-caused starts are by far the largest cause of the Bureau's fires. As these fire causes are more precisely determined, prevention efforts can be focused on those areas that need them most, resulting in the protection of natural resources, communities, and firefighters from catastrophic wildfires.

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